

## CLAIMS

1. A method for controlling access by a first computer to an on-line  
5 user group hosted by a second computer, wherein the first computer stores  
personal data of a user, comprising:

providing (18) from said second computer to said first computer a  
privacy policy identifying the personal data required to be provided to permit  
access to said user group;

10 at said first computer determining (22) whether a received privacy policy  
is acceptable; and

if acceptable, at the first computer selecting (30) from store the personal  
data identified in the privacy policy and transmitting (28) the same to the  
second computer.

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2. A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the first computer  
presents a received privacy policy to a user, and acceptance or otherwise of  
said policy is determined by user input (24).

20 3. A method as claimed in Claim 2, wherein the first computer  
formats the received privacy policy prior to presentation to the user.

4. A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the first computer  
stores privacy policy preference data for a user and, based (26) on the same,  
25 determines (30) automatically whether a received privacy policy is acceptable.

5. A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the step (22) of  
determining acceptance includes a process of negotiation (38) between the  
first computer user and the user group host.

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6. A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein a received privacy  
policy may be partly accepted (22.B), with only a part (30.B) of the requested

personal data being transmitted (28) as a result, and only limited access being granted to the on-line user group.

7. Computer apparatus configured for accessing an on-line user  
5 group hosted by a second computer and comprising:

storage means (54, 56, 68) for personal data of a user of the apparatus;  
communications means (58) operable to exchange data with the second  
computer over a data link (60) and receive from said second computer a  
privacy policy identifying the personal data required to be provided to permit  
10 access to said user group;

programmable processor means (50) configured to determine whether a  
received privacy policy is acceptable and, if so, to select from said storage  
means (54, 56, 68) the personal data identified in the privacy policy and, via  
the communications means (58), transmit the same to the second computer.  
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8. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 7, further comprising an output  
device (64) wherein the processor means (50) presents a received privacy  
policy to a user, and user input means (62) by operation of which a user  
determines acceptance or otherwise of said policy.  
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9. A method as claimed in Claim 8, wherein the processor means  
(50) is arranged to format the received privacy policy prior to presentation by  
the output device (64).

10. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 7, wherein the storage means  
(54, 56, 68) holds privacy policy preference data for a user and, based on the  
same, the processor means (50) determines automatically whether a received  
privacy policy is acceptable.  
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11. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 7, wherein the processor means  
(50) is further operable to determine partial acceptance of a received privacy  
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policy, and to select from said storage means (54, 56, 68) only a part of the requested usage data.

12. A software utility operable to configure a programmable device to  
5 perform the functions of the first computer in a method as claimed in Claim 1.

13. A storage device (68) holding a software utility as claimed in  
Claim 12.